ing—a Siberian "town" with three or four chimneys—but no building was visible from the river. Steamers visited this place four times a year—twice on the way from Yakutsk to Nelkan on the Maya and twice on return trips. Our steamer was the first since the preceding autumn, and her arrival was a major event. A crowd assembled at the landing to greet her and watch the unloading of crates, barrels, and bags.

I went ashore in a canoe. The landing was surrounded by the virgin forest. There was only a small opening, too narrow for a cart, in the wall of trees interwoven with lianas. Nearby lay the contraption the natives used for transportation—two young flexible birches tied together, with a rope attached to the trunk ends and the tops spread on the ground. A horse was harnessed to this vehicle. The crates and barrels were put on the tops and dragged. Some young men were hiding behind the trees. Then a few women and children joined them. All were fascinated by the sight of the steamer and the pile of goods at the landing. They exchanged remarks and jokes among themselves but did not approach the landing. Then three men boarded the steamer—two grim Siberian peasants and a native, a slim youth with a bronzed face, bright smile, and sparkling white teeth.

As we moved on, the steamer would drop anchor from time to time and emit a long, shrill whistle. After a minute of silence, a shot would answer from the depth of the taiga. Then a boat from the steamer would take a few bundles and bales ashore and return after unloading them. Again a long whistle, the anchor would be hoisted, and the ship would continue upstream.

The unloading was supervised by a sedate middle-aged man who shared the stateroom with us. I asked him about his business. "This is Tungus country," he explained. "The natives live here and there. They do nothing but hunt. I bring them powder, brick tea, butter, flour, cartridges, lead—everything they need."

"And how do they pay?"

"With furs in the winter. The year's bag brings them twenty rubles, forty rubles, sometimes even a hundred rubles. But they don't need money. They get everything from me."

"Do you leave a separate package for each customer on the bank?"

"Why? That would complicate things. Everybody takes what belongs to him from the pile. No trouble. There are no white people around here."